

# The Great Opponent

## The Devil in Early Jewish and Formative Christian Literature

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My article has an intentionally limited scope. It intends to give an overview of the various images and functions connected with the figure of the devil in Early Jewish and Formative Christian literature,<sup>1</sup> including their literary basis in the Hebrew Bible. It is not so much interested in the origin of these images in the Ancient Orient and Antiquity as in their socio-political background and meaningfulness. Early Judaism and Christianity are separated for the sake of structuring the article; it would be more to the point to regard Formative Christianity as part of the Judaisms of the first century.

### 1. The Beginnings of Satan in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew noun *satan* (שָׂטָן/śātān; “adversary, opponent”) in general bears neutral connotations, which seems somewhat strange in view of modern linguistic usage. In the story of Balaam in Num 22:22-35, e.g., the angel of the Lord acts as an “opponent” of Balaam in favour of Israel in keeping the prophet from cursing Israel. Here the heavenly being called *satan* acts as the messenger of Jhwh in accordance with his will, not as his enemy. This is one of nine occurrences of the noun *satan* in the Hebrew Bible. In five contexts, it refers to human beings indicating their function as “adversary” or “accuser”. In four, it refers to celestial beings like the angel of Num 22.<sup>2</sup>

Representations of evil as opponent of God and his good will in favour of humankind can appear in various forms in the Hebrew Bible: The serpent in the story of the Fall of Man (Gen 3:1-7) is an embodiment of a dimension of man which tempts man to revolt against the order of creation. The younger Wisdom of Israel can interpret the moti-

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1 For the evil in Antiquity, see Speyer, *Fluchmächte*.

2 Cf. Breytenbach / Day, *Satan* 726.

vation of the serpent as envy and the serpent as the devil: as a result of the envy of the devil death came into the world (Wis 2:24).

Prominent have been political representations of evil which threaten Israel or Zion, clearly being the result of historical experiences. So prophecy has minted an anti-figure to JHWH, trying to erect its own political or military power against the salvation plan of JHWH and behaving in accordance with its own hubris – seen from the perspective of the prophets – against JHWH; examples are Isa 10:5-15; 14:4-21; Ezek 38:1-39:22; Nah 1:11-14; Jdt 3:8; 6:2; Dan 7:17-27; 8:9-12,23-25.<sup>3</sup> In the political sphere, evil is experienced as an extensive threat. The end of this presumptuous political anti-figure is determined by JHWH as a being thrown off its height – a radical reversal of its former greatness. In the language of myth, a presumptuous king or ruler is thrown off the mountain of the Gods (cf. Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:11-19; Lam 2:1-2). As a consequence, the right world order is re-established.

It was a step further to create a mythological idea of a heavenly opponent of God who is part of the members of the heavenly council meeting, which is responsible for God's plan in creation and history (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10; 1Kgs 22:19-22). Various influences on this process from other cultures and religions are quite probable, but shall not be discussed here.<sup>4</sup>

A short but close look at the relevant texts is appropriate. The scene in Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10 describes a gathering of the "sons of God", the heavenly council.<sup>5</sup> Extrapolated from these "sons" is *the* satan (with a definite article in Hebrew), who is described as a heavenly being which performs a special function: that of an accuser against the righteous Job. "Satan" is probably not yet used as a proper name. The mythological narrative is created to give a response to a theological threatening, probably raised by the Babylonian exile and so dating back to the early post-exilic time:<sup>6</sup> God's maintenance of the creation and the world order is taken for granted, but satan embodies the challenge of a moral order in which the righteous unfailingly reaps reward. Accordingly, satan's test case of righteousness occurs in two steps: first, the withdrawal of prospering and welfare, and then that of health. Perceived with the eyes of the protagonist Job, satan achieves his decline and disease and there-

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3 Cf. Bodendorfer, Teufel 1361.

4 Cf. Riley, Devil 244-246. For the development of the picture of a great evil figure, see Forsyth, Enemy (1987).

5 Nielsen's concentration on the father-son-relation neglects the character of the devil as a powerful heavenly being in contrast to humankind and the many connotations of the son-metaphor in Israel and Judaism (Nielsen, Satan).

6 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Buch 344.

fore acts as the tempter of his relationship to God. What might be satan's motivation for doing so is not the subject of the narrative. But a religious stock figure is born in order to personify the temptation of turning away from God as a consequence of God's refusal (or inability) to improve human conditions of life, be they individual or collective. Without a doubt, satan is presented as a heavenly being, a member of the heavenly council, but as such subject to God's power and acting only on God's instructions. No dualism with a highest god and a highest evil force can be constructed as a basic scheme of this narrative.<sup>7</sup>

In a prophetic vision, Zech 3 sketches the scene of a tribunal in the heavenly council. The Jerusalem high priest Joshua is standing in front of the messenger or angel of JHWH, with *the* satan (again with the definite article) on his right-hand side acting as accuser. The messenger rebukes satan with reference to the election of Jerusalem and declares Joshua free of guilt – symbolically replacing his filthy garments with clean, solemn clothing –, and promises him the lasting rule over the house of God, if he will be keeping obedience to JHWH's order. It is evident that no word of satan's accusation is rendered. We may conclude that the narrative function of this figure lays in its role of an accuser, which integrates an opponent of the messenger and his supporting the high priest. This constellation of figures seems to mirror a socio-political realm of the Jerusalem community in the historical context of Zechariah's vision: in the time after the return from exile, while the process of rebuilding the temple was going on (about 520 BCE<sup>8</sup>), the restoration community in Jerusalem seems to have been deeply divided over issues of cult and priesthood.<sup>9</sup> A disagreement arose about the issue of whether Joshua should become the high priest. In the prophetic vision, the matter is decided in front of the heavenly court – in favour of the Joshua-group and against their opponents, being represented by satan. What stronger argument could the Joshua-group bring to bear than the decision of JHWH himself? An internal group division is thus likely to develop as *Sitz im Leben* of the figure of satan, who can be described as a projection of the conduct of the opposing group into the divine realm.

Finally, the short reference to Satan in 1Chr 21:1 needs consideration. While in the pre-text of 1Chr 21:1, 2Sam 24:1, it is JHWH himself who provoked king David to take a census of Israel (an act obviously judged as sinful), in 1Chr 21:1 a being called *Satan* (*without* the definite

7 For the references to satan as a heavenly being in the OT, see Breytenbach / Day, *Satan* 727-730; Fabry, *Satan* 272-286.

8 Cf. Zenger, *Buch* 580-581.

9 See Hanson, *Dawn* 32-279.

article) undertakes the task to provoke David to order the sinful census. Clearly, this textual alteration being done by the Chronicler, takes away the burden of responsibility for the census from JHWH. The intention of the Chronicler may have been in a more general way due to his conception of God: to distance JHWH from tempting a human being to sin. On the other hand, in the narrower literary context, the Chronicler may have intended to keep away any disturbances from the relationship between JHWH and David, whose reign he is portraying in an idealized way. Unfortunately, the dating of Chronicles is much disputed and a long time span from the late sixth century to the early Maccabean period is supported by several scholars.<sup>10</sup> A later dating, however, seems more probable in view of the Chronicler's practice of integrating a whole lot of biblical books in his work, showing a (pre-)canonical awareness. If this is judged correctly, 1Chr 21:1 is later than the two other satan-texts, and the brevity of the mention of this figure can be interpreted as referring to a character well-known in its cultural context and therefore as a stage in the process of conceptualization: *Satan*, now understood as a proper name, bears the features of being an accuser (here against Israel) and a tempter (of Israel's king David).

To sum up, a cluster of motifs concerning a figure called (the) *satan* emerges from the texts discussed above. These motifs are apt to form a concept of Satan, which then becomes discernible in Early Jewish and Christian texts. The relevant motifs are: (1) Satan is a member of the heavenly council and, consequently, a supernatural being, but unambiguously subordinate to God. (2) He can fulfil the function of (a) a tempter of the righteous on earth and (b) their accuser in the divine council; (c) as a tempter, he can be the cause of impoverishment and disease. (3) Viewed from a socio-historical perspective, he can be conceived of by a group as a heavenly representative of an opposing group.

## 2. Conceptualizations of Satan in Early Judaism

### 2.1. Terminology: The Multiple Names of the Devil

In the LXX the Hebrew שָׂטָן/*sātān* is usually translated as the Greek noun διάβολος, which is best rendered as "adversary, antagonist, opponent".<sup>11</sup>

10 See Steins, Bücher 258-260, versus Breytenbach / Day, Satan 730. Steins with good reason favours a later dating.

11 An exception constitutes 3Reg 11:14,23 LXX, where the transliteration σατάν is used regarding a human adversary.

From this Greek noun the Latin loanword *diabolus*, the English ‘devil’ and the German ‘Teufel’ are derived. In Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period, the term διάβολος is rather common (preferred by GLAE, Philo, Josephus; cf. TestNaph 8:4,6), while σατάν/σατανᾶς as Greek transliteration from the Hebrew or Aramaic is rarely used<sup>12</sup>. In the first century Christian writings (NT), the terms satan and devil obviously are used interchangeably, which is demonstrated by the alteration of Mark 1:13 in Matt 4:1 and Luke 4:2 and the combination of the two names within a list of epithets (great dragon, old serpent) in Rev 12:9; 20:2.<sup>13</sup> While some, especially early, first century Christian writings prefer Satan (Pauline epistles, Mark, Revelation), others favour devil (Q, John, Catholic Epistles).

Other terms used for a heavenly opponent of God are “Mastemah”, nearly restricted to the book of Jubilees (cf. 2.2. below), and the more common “Belial”, particularly in the Dead Sea Scrolls (cf. 1QM XIII 11-12; CD IV 13; V 18) and the TestXII, but also in Jub 15:33, VitProph 17:2 and 2Cor 6:15. In the Scrolls, Satan and Belial are used interchangeably.

Limited to the NT are nominal forms which denote a special function such as the evil one (Matt 6:13; 13:19; John 17:15; Eph 6:16; 1John 5:18), the depraver (1Cor 10:10; Heb 11:28), the tempter (1Thess 3:5; Matt 4:3), the accuser (Rev 12:10). Furthermore, the devil is called the enemy (Matt 13:25,39), the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; perhaps an allusion to the demonized Roman Emperor), the ruler of the power of the air (Eph 2:2), the god of this aeon (2Cor 4:4), the serpent (that conceived Eve, cf. Gen 3:1-15; 2Cor 11:3; Rev 12:9; 20:2). Another proper name is Beelzebul (Mark 3:22; Matt 9:34; 12:24; Luke 11:15).

As a matter of fact, in Early Jewish writings the figure of the devil undergoes increasing literary use.<sup>14</sup> Some literary outlines provide important aspects of contexts and functions of this figure.

12 Sir 21:27; TestDan 3:6; 5:6; 6:1; TestGad 4:7; GLAE 17:1; TestJob 4:3-11; 6:3-5; 27:1-7. In Rabbinic texts it becomes common from the fourth/fifth century onwards.

13 Cf. Mark 4:15 and Luke 8:12. The same synonymous reference of the two nouns is found in the somewhat later TestJob 3:3,6; cf. 16:2; 27:1 with 17:1; 26:6.

14 The reasons for this probably lay in the influences of the cultural and religious environment of post-exilic Israel; cf. Fabry, Satan 288-290.

## 2.2. The Book of Jubilees

In the book of Jubilees (originating from about the middle of the second century BCE), the heavenly opponent and enemy of humankind is called Mastemah, meaning literally “hostility”.<sup>15</sup> In Jub 10:8,11 (cf. 40:9; 46:2) Mastemah is identified with Satan. Interestingly, in 3:17-23 the serpent in the garden of Eden tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit is not connected with Mastemah, whose first appearance<sup>16</sup> is in the story of Noah (from 10:8 on). Mastemah is introduced as the “Prince of the (evil) spirits” (10:8) and therefore part of the demonological worldview of the book.<sup>17</sup> In 10:1-12 the sons of Noah are severely threatened by the demons, which causes Noah to pray to God to bring to an end the influence of the demons. When God thereupon ordered to bind the demons, Mastemah entered the scene asking God to preserve his ability to act and to leave him a rest of his spirits. His reason for this plea is significant: it is his task to tempt and to ruin humankind because of its malice (10:8), and therefore he needs the demons as his agents. God allows a tenth of the demons to be saved from being bound underground in the place of judgement (10:9,11). As a result, Mastemah keeps his influence and authority among humankind. Clearly, he is subordinated to God, which is proved by the exodus account (48:9-18; cf. 49:2) and the sacrifice of Isaac as well (18:9-12 – confrontation with the angel of the Lord).

Mastemah effects his purpose to menace humankind throughout the history of Israel, as is exemplified first by the sons of Noah in 11:2-7, who are tempted by the spirits of Mastemah to kill each other and to commit sin, pollution and idolatry. By contrast, the notion that the influence of Mastemah and his evil spirits is broken indicates a period of blessing and welfare, a period of an undisturbed relationship to God (19:28; 40:9; 46:2; eschatologically 23:29; 50:5). Another kind of threatening humankind regards nourishment, as Mastemah commands the birds to eat away the seed in order to ruin the harvest (11:11). The

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15 For the semantic evolution of the term “Mastemah” cf. van Henten, *Mastemah* 553.

16 In Jub 1:20 Belchor (i.e. Beliar) is mentioned as the tempter and depraver of the people of God.

17 In Jub 10:1-8, the demons are connected with the “watchers”, the fallen angels, as their forefathers (cf. Gen 6:1-4; 1Hen 6-16); in 10:5, they are identified as the souls of the dead giants. Their ruler is Mastemah, who seems therefore to be identified with the leader of these fallen angels (in 1Hen 54:6: Azazel). Cf. Riley, *Devil* 246. A tradition history of early accounts of these fallen angels is presented by Stuckenbruck, *Origins*. – The later texts 2Hen 29:4-5 and VitAd 12-16 tell about the primal fall of the devil (characterized as an “archangel” or one of the angels) out of heaven because of his hubris.

prince Mastemah acts as tempter of Abraham, because it is he who urges God to put Abraham to the test and sacrifice Isaac (17:16). He stands on the side of the Egyptians in trying to destroy Moses and the people of Israel (48:2-3,9,12,15-16). At the same time, the final loss of his ability to accuse Israel is given special mention (48:15,18). A comparison between the accounts of Isaac's sacrifice and Moses' destruction with its pre-texts shows that Mastemah obviously takes over the function of evil which originally rooted in God himself.<sup>18</sup> God is discharged from effecting evil.

What perhaps sheds light on the situation of the Jewish group reading Jubilees is the possibility of finding protection against the evil spirits in obeying the Mosaic law and staying in the covenant, demonstrated significantly by practicing circumcision (15:32-34). Jubilees is responding to a cultural menace, seen in the attraction of Hellenistic cultural achievements (grasped as dangerous for the identity of the group and therefore demonized), stressing the Jewish way of life and Jewish identity markers. So, too, the socio-political function of the figure of Mastemah gains importance: he provides a clear, supernaturally personalized concept of the enemy in order to lead the readers to resist the cultural and political powers of a dominant (the Hellenistic) culture. To conclude, the picture of Mastemah corresponds with the above motifs, supplemented by exercising his power through demons (and animal agents).

### 2.3. The Dead Sea Scrolls

Well attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls as name of the evil force, the devil, is *Belial*/בליעל, which is philologically most likely rendered with "wickedness".<sup>19</sup> Especially in the War Scroll (1QM) and the Hymns Scroll (1QH), an ongoing struggle between the powers of good and of evil is described. In the heavenly realm, it can be depicted as a battle between the angel Michael and Belial, and as a human counterpart, the Teacher of Righteousness, representing the forces of light and good, stands opposite the wicked priest as his opponent, representing the

18 So Jub 17:16 / Gen 22:1-2; Jub 48:2 / Exod 4:24; cf. 1Chr 21:1 / 2Sam 24:1.

19 Sperling, *Belial* 169-170. For the Essene picture of Belial and its possible development see Steudel, *God and Belial*; further Martone, *Evil*. The symbols of evil found in the Scrolls and their history-of-religions background displays Nitzan, *Evil*. A possible development out of Enochic Judaism is discussed by Suter, *Theodicy*.

forces of darkness and evil.<sup>20</sup> The “people of the lot of Belial” are opposed to the “people of the lot of God” (1QS I 16 – II 9). Unquestionably, however, Belial is subordinated to God, as 1QS III 25 states that God created both the spirits of light and those of darkness.

It is important that in the eschatological war Belial will be defeated by God and his agents, what results in the permanent annihilation of Belial and all the sons of darkness, the evil forces, be they angelic or human (1QM I 1-16). The battles which go with this war are supernaturally guided by the prayers and signals of the priests, leading to the impression of ritually or liturgically structured events. In a pragmatic perspective, that is why eschatological hope is justified for the community which is struggling with its powerful opponents, for the present age is distinguished by the community as the time of Belial’s rule,<sup>21</sup> his hostility against the children of light (i.e. the in-group). In 1QM XIII 11, Belial is called “angel of hostility”, the one who brings destruction, who accuses and pronounces guilty. In 1QS III 20-25 and 1QM XIII 10-12 an antithesis is described between the Prince of Light and Belial, the Angel of Darkness:<sup>22</sup> Belial rules all children of falsehood, leads all children of righteousness astray and causes them to fulfil unlawful deeds.

All the more important is the possibility of protection against Belial. To this end 4Q286 fr. 7, II 1-12 formulates curses against Belial and his associates (cf. 1QM XIII 4-5), which is betraying a feeling of a constant threat to the community. In a more reflected way, protection against Belial is expected by God’s covenant and faithfulness (1QM XIV 8-10), by obeying the Torah of Moses, circumcision and reversal (CD XVI 1-8; cf. VI 11 – VII 9; Jub 15:32-34), i.e. belonging to the *yahad*. In the pesher 4Q174 III 7-9, the righteous are promised rescue from the sons of Belial (probably the Pharisees). Interestingly, these protecting factors are identity markers of Israel in general and of the priestly orientated community in particular. So they can be conceived as a reflection of the social situation of the group behind the Scrolls which is trying to protect itself against another culturally influential force.<sup>23</sup> The devil is functioning as the heavenly stock figure of the opposing group (i.e. the incumbent High Priest in Jerusalem and the associated priesthood, seen

20 Cf. Schiffman, Community 50; Sperling, Belial 171. Another human representation of opponents is mentioned in CD V 17-19: Moses and Aaron / Prince of the Lights – Jannes and his brothers / Belial.

21 Cf. CD IV 12-19 (three nets of Belial: fornication, riches, defilement of the temple); XII 2; 1QM XIV 9-10; 4Q491 fr. 8-10, I; 4Q390; 11Q05 XIX 15.

22 See von der Osten-Sacken, Gott 116, 198.

23 In CD VIII 1-3 Belial becomes God’s eschatological instrument in annihilating the apostates of the community.



in connection with the nations and the apostates of Israel), which is unambiguously qualified as substantially evil. As the “sons of Belial” (4Q174 III 8; 4Q286 fr. 7, II 6; 4Q386 fr. 1, II 3), the other group is obviously disparaged. The metaphor of “battle” reflects the seriousness of the encounter as seen by the marginalized group of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The dangerousness of the opponents’ way of life is depicted by means of the metaphor of a viper’s venom, which causes pain, disease and weakness (1QH XIII 26-29). Being tested and purified by Belial provides an explanation of the present suffering of the *yahad*, but in the end originates in God himself, who uses Belial as his instrument and will provide eschatological release. In this regard, Belial is a function of the eschatological dualism of the community of the Scrolls. Hence the absence of Satan is a characteristic of the Eschaton (4Q504 fr. 1-2, IV 8-13).

#### 2.4. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

TestLev 19:1 provokes a decision, metaphorically speaking, between light and darkness or, on a personal level, between the law of the Lord and the deeds of Beliar. Two ways, a good and a bad one, are available for the journey of life (TestAss 1:3-9). This phenomenon, which I would like to call an “ethical dualism”, is characteristic of TestXII and resembles in a way the dualistic features found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>24</sup> Beliar and his evil spirits throughout epitomize tempting by the desires and leading a wicked life.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, the spirits of Beliar have to ask (God for) permission to tempt humankind (TestBen 3:3). TestDan 6:2,4 mentions in passing that “Satan” (here also called the “enemy”) rules an empire, whereby a demonological worldview is reflected. Frequently, the demand is issued that the people of Israel be on their guard against the threat of Beliar and his spirits and to overcome Beliar by avoiding bad conduct, living in purity and without sin and practicing the good (TestDan 6:1-8; cf. TestRub 4:11; TestSim 5:3; TestIss 7:1-7; TestNaph 8:4,6; TestJos 6:1). Who decides on Beliar will be ruled by him (TestAss 1:8), but who keeps the law and the commandment of the Lord makes Beliar flee (TestDan 5:1). The instruction conveyed by this is to keep Israel’s way of life. TestAss 6:4-6 adds an eschatological mo-

24 For the difference in the form Beliar / Belial cf. Sperling, Belial 170. Beliar is perhaps reminiscent of a pun on the opposition of lightness / darkness connected with this figure. Cf. the same dualistic imagery of light and darkness in 2Cor 6:14-15.

25 TestIss 6:1; TestDan 5:5-6; TestAss 3:2; TestJos 7:4; TestBen 3:4; 6:1; 7:1. With regard to whoring TestRub 4:7,11; TestSim 5:3; wrath TestDan 1:7; 3:6; 4:7; hate TestGad 4:7.

tivation: the eschatological fate will prolong the earthly decision between following the angels of the Lord or of Beliar.

It is not until the eschatological new creation that Beliar will be bound and thus made ineffective and the evil forces be powerless (TestLev 18:10-12). The promise is Beliar's eschatological loss of power: God's victory over Beliar in the final battle (TestDan 5:10-11) and retaliation (TestLev 3:3) are announced; Beliar will be thrown into the never-ending fire (TestJud 25:3).

## 2.5. The Greek Life of Adam and Eve (GLAE)

At the centre of the narration of GLAE stands the story of the Fall of Man, told by Eve herself, who was deceived by the devil (GLAE 15:1-30:1).<sup>26</sup> As far as I can see, this is one of the first instances of the devil explicitly mentioned as the cause of the Fall and integrated in the account of Gen 3.<sup>27</sup> Wis 2:23-24, in which the devil's motivation is named, provides another early mention: the devil's envy brought death into the world.<sup>28</sup> Initially "the enemy" (ἐχθρός; 2:4; 7:2; 8:2; 15:1; 25:4) serves as a cipher for the devil (διάβολος); the identification becomes clear in 15:3. He places enmity between humankind and God's commandments (25:4), acting as tempter and depraver, which becomes paradigmatic in the deceiving of Eve (15:1; 16:5; 23:5; 26:1; 30:1; 39:2; 42:7).

The devil first makes the serpent envious because of Adam's higher rank in paradise in order to persuade it to become his instrument (16:2-5).<sup>29</sup> To deceive Eve and Adam and to persuade them to eat from the tree of life (which causes death), the devil takes hold first of the serpent and then of Eve, finding a living thing to speak through (16:5; 17:4; 18-19; 21:3). The result is described as losing righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and glory (δόξα) (20:1-2; cf. 21:2,6), i.e. losing the immediate closeness to the will of God; in 8:2, this is interpreted as leaving the covenant (διαθήκη).

26 GLAE (or the Apocalypse of Moses) probably originated in the late first century AD. Thus Dochhorn, *Apokalypse* 149-172; Schreiber, *Mensch* 50. – Only the (later) Latin, Armenian and Georgian versions contain the story of the fall of Satan; cf. *Vita Adae* 11-17.

27 Cf. Dochhorn, *Apokalypse* 287. In 1Hen 69:6 it is one of the fallen angels, Gadreel, who tempted Eve. Presumably later is 2Hen 31:3-6.

28 For the envy of the serpent cf. Josephus, *ant.* 1:41.

29 At this point the story adds a scene in which the devil – unexpectedly he is called "Satan" here – joined the angelic court to worship God, appearing as an angel (17:1-2). His subordination to God and perhaps his hypocrisy are demonstrated by that. Dochhorn, *Apokalypse* 296,321-323, however, judges this notice as an interpolation.

As far as the theological background is concerned, in the scene of bringing Adam and Eve out of paradise the question arises whether it is God's fault that humankind has to suffer (i.e. is far from paradise). The angels, however, are stating God's just decision (27:1-5). Thereby the responsibility of man is emphasized, and a dualism is fixed between God's good intent with man and the devil's will to deprave man. Between these two spheres of influence (which are not thought to be ontologically equal) man has to decide: His way to salvation leads through the struggles of life which he can withstand by being vigilant and protecting himself from evil (28:4; 30:1). The key word φυλάττειν refers to leading a good life (28:4; 30:1) and, more specifically, to keeping God's commandment (23:3; 24:3) and to the task of guarding the paradise (15:2; 17:3).<sup>30</sup> So vigilance becomes a central motif of the story's pragmatics. Shelter and rescue from evil can be achieved by keeping God's commandment (ἐντολή; 23:3; 24:1,3; 25:1; 39:1).

Adam, who embodies man per se, is granted forgiveness and redemption not until his death (37:1-6; cf. 13:3-5; 41:2). An eschatological reversal (along the *Urzeit-Endzeit* scheme) is promised by God himself, and it will bring about a reversal of the roles of the devil and Adam: Adam will be seated on the throne of the devil, and the devil will be thrown down from his height and condemned (39:2-3) – in GLAE, too, the eschaton is characterized by the absence of the devil.

In the narrative of GLAE, the devil embodies the constant threat to man of being deceived and depraved by evil, which inevitably leads to disease and death (3:1; 5:2-3; 6:3; 7:1; 8:2; 9:2; 14:2) and all hardships of the body (24:1-25:4). Therefore, the devil provokes violating God's commandment. For the readers, he provides a concept of the enemy in order to become aware of his dangerousness and to pay attention to him intensely. The context is less political, but perhaps a cultural encounter between Jewish and Hellenistic influence, or, more generally, an answer to the challenge of a threatened life and the dominance of a pagan culture.

## 2.6. Other Early Jewish Writings

In the Parables of 1Hen (1Hen 37-71), no clear picture or narrative role of Satan emerges.<sup>31</sup> The fallen angels fulfil the function of tempting

30 Cf. Dochhorn, *Apokalypse* 289,303.

31 Parts of the Parables originated in the first century BCE, important passages were written in the first decades of the first century AD. Cf. Schreiber, *Gesalbter* 324-325.

humankind (e.g. 64:2; 67:6-7).<sup>32</sup> In the portrayal of the last judgement of the fallen angels (67:4-69:25; cf. 21:6,10), the leaders of these angels are charged of having been tempting the angels of lower rank to get involved with the daughters of men (69:4-5; clearly an allusion to Gen 6:1-4); one of them tempted Eve (69:6).<sup>33</sup> The devil plays no role in these events. Only gradually does a sexual connotation enter the story of Eve's temptation (cf. 4Macc 18:8). Otherwise only fragmentary pieces of an image of the devil can be detected; "Satan" is rather an attribute to connote evil power. In 1Hen 65:6, acts of violence are connected with "the satans" (plural!), which seems to allude to the host of Satan, the evil spirits (known from other sources). In 54:6, the fallen angels (54:5: the host of Azazel)<sup>34</sup> are thrown into fire for punishment because they had become servants of Satan and tempted humankind. In 53:3, Satan seems to be the originator of the end-time "instruments of torture" prepared for the earthly rulers.

In Sib 3:63-67 (first century AD), Beliar is prophesied to lead astray the people with great signs. He is characterized as coming ἐκ Σεβαστηνῶν (3:63), which perhaps alludes to the Latin *Augusti* and means the diabolical character of the Roman Emperor, probably Nero.<sup>35</sup> If this interpretation is correct,<sup>36</sup> the threatening political power is dismissed as an agent of the devil.

When God's eschatological reign is accomplished, the end (and annihilation) of the devil is promised in AssMos 10:1.

The novel of Joseph and Aseneth integrates the devil in its treatment of the cultural encounter between Judaism and paganism: The polytheistic (Egyptian) culture is metaphorically depicted as a child of the "wild old lion", which is a cipher for the devil and his dangerousness; while the Egyptian Aseneth is turning away from the idols of her traditional culture, she has to fear the persecution of this "father of the Egyptian gods" (12:9-10). Yet, the God of Israel is able to rescue her (12:11-14).

32 Cf. in the "Book of the Watchers" 1Hen 8:1-4; 9:6-8; 10:7-8.

33 Cf. Gen 3. For the first time in Early Jewish literature a connection between Gen 3 and Gen 6 is made here; it is still missing in Josephus, ant. 1:41; cf. Forsyth, *Old Enemy* 223. For the roots of identifying the serpent with the devil, see Martinek, Schlange (1996).

34 Azazel and the fallen angels are also mentioned in the fragment 4Q180 fr. 1, 7-9.

35 Collins, *Egyptian Judaism* 82-87; Collins, *Oracles* 360,363; Sperling, *Belial* 171.

36 Merkel, Sibyllinen 1060 favours an allusion to Sebaste, since 25 BCE the name of Samaria, so the conflict would be between Jews and Samaritans – but also political.

Interestingly, in the apocalyptic writings 4Esr and 2Bar, the devil is not even mentioned.<sup>37</sup> This observation shows that the devil is not necessarily a stock figure of ethical or eschatological discourses.

## 2.7. Summary

The following motifs can be added to the cluster mentioned above, forming together a concept of the devil: (1) The devil can take hold of a person (TestNaph 8:6; TestAss 1:8; GLAE 16:5; 17:4; 21:3; Luke 22:3; John 13:27). (2) The devil is the ruler of the evil demons, a motif that reflects a demonological worldview (Jub 10:8; TestDan 6:1). (3) When the influence of the devil is broken, a period of blessing or the Eschaton, respectively, is opened (Jub 19:28; 40:9; 46:2; GLAE 39:2-3; TestLev 18:10-12; TestJud 25:3; AssMos 10:1; Rom 16:20; Luke 11:20; 10:18).

## 3. Prospects for the New Testament

The different names for the devil common in early Christian writings show that these writings take part in the concepts of the devil prevailing in Early Judaism. In the following, I try to categorize the predominant images of the devil in the earliest Christian writings.

### 3.1. Traditional Roles of the Devil

That the devil is the ruler over a kingdom of darkness is a presupposition underlying the relevant texts. As such he possesses cosmic power and a host of evil spirits or demons to oppose the angels of God and to deprave humankind. The demonic host is mentioned, e.g., in Mark 3:22; Matt 12:24; 25:41; Luke 11:15,18; Rev 12:7,9. Being called Beelzebul, the devil is the principal of the demons (Mark 3:22-26 par.). In Eph 2:2; 6:11-12 (cf. 1:21; Col 2:15), he is named as the chief of dark and wicked cosmic spirits and forces effective in the heavens, the air and on earth.<sup>38</sup> The power of the devil affects and harms the whole world. Therefore he is called the "ruler of this world" in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 and the "god of this world" in 2Cor 4:4; Acts 26:18 states the "dominion of Sa-

<sup>37</sup> Only in 2Bar 48:42 is the serpent named.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. astral elements in the world in Gal 4:3,9 and conflicts in heaven between Michael and the devil about the corpse of Moses in Jude 9. That the devil is subordinated to God is evident in his asking for permission to tempt the disciples in Luke 22:31.

tan" in the world (cf. Luke 4:6; Col 1:13; Eph 2:1-2; 1John 5:19). The devil brings his negative influence on the world to bear by causing disease and disability (2Cor 12:7; Matt 12:22-24; Luke 9:37-45; 11:14; 13:10-13,16; Acts 5:16), often by demonic possession (Mark 1:34; 3:22; 5:1-20), and by tempting and leading the righteous to sin, i.e. into opposition to God (Matt 4:1-11 par.; 1Cor 7:5; 2Cor 2:11; 11:3; 1Tim 3:6-7; 5:15; 1John 3:8,10). He deceives humankind (2Cor 11:3; Rev 12:9; 20:3), e.g. by disguising himself as an angel of light (2Cor 11:14), and makes it blind to the light of the gospel (2Cor 4:4). Thereby the devil intends to induce the righteous to break with the Christian community. 1Thess 2:18 mentions Satan as a supernatural embodiment of a hindrance to Paul's missionary work. In Mark 4:15 (Luke 8:12; Matt 13:19) Satan steals away the word of salvation.

### 3.2. The Overcoming of the Devil in Jesus Christ

It appears specific to the Christian conviction that the eschatological extermination of the devil and all evil has already begun. Already here in the present world the kingdom of God proves to be more powerful than the kingdom of Satan. Jesus is the one who has seen the fall of Satan out of heaven, as Luke 10:18 narrates (cf. John 12:31), taking up a well known motif. Jesus as empowered representative of God's kingdom is able to cast out demons (Mark 1:21-28).<sup>39</sup> Metaphorically speaking, he is able to attack and overpower the "Strong Man", i.e. the devil, by entering his house and carrying off his property, i.e. releasing people formerly subjected to demonic oppression (Matt 12:28-29; Luke 11:20-22). Jesus' healing activity means releasing people from being under the control of the devil (Acts 10:38).

Jesus had proved able to overcome the temptation by Satan, as the Synoptic accounts of the temptation story reveal (Mark 1:12-13; Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Seen from a history-of-religions perspective, the archetypal battle myth is historicized as a confrontation between the devil and Jesus.<sup>40</sup> In the Matthean and Lukan versions, political overtones can be clearly heard: giving wheat or bread to feed the people – in the Roman Imperial ideology a sign of the Golden Age; ruling the kingdoms of the earth (Luke 4:5: *οἰκουμένη*) with all their glory. Jesus overcomes the temptation to act on the same military level and with the same weapons as the political powers, i.e. to become an agent of the

39 For Jesus' exorcisms as proof of the defeat of Satan's kingdom, see Evans, *Inaugurating*.

40 See Aune, *Teufel* 184.

devil possessing power over the earthly kingdoms. This attitude becomes paradigmatic of the Jesus community to understand their own role in the political sphere as a small and marginalized group.

Later accounts attribute the power to destroy the influence of the devil to Jesus as “son of God” (1John3:8) or, more specifically, to his death (Heb 2:14). In 1John 2:1, Jesus acts as a heavenly advocate (against the accusations of the devil).

It is the disciples’ faith, i.e. their loyalty to Christ, which protects them from the temptations and persecutions of the devil (Luke 22:31-32; Acts 26:18; Eph 6:16; 1Pet 5:8-9). Shielded by the arms of God, the Christian is able to resist the devil’s attacks (Eph 6:11-17). Resisting the devil makes him flee (Jas 4:7). Because of Christ’s significance the Jewish identity markers like circumcision, purity et al. are no longer necessary as protection against the devil. Thus in Christian thought faith in Christ in a way takes the place of these identity markers.

With regard to the Lukan theology of salvation history, the particular question arises whether Luke was thinking of a time without Satan between Satan’s leaving Jesus for a certain time after the temptation failed (Luke 4:13) and his taking hold of Judas Iscariot before the passion (22:3), as Conzelmann puts it.<sup>41</sup> The devil, however, is always active throughout Jesus’ ministry, and he is constantly trying to gain power over the people of Israel. That becomes obvious in some texts: according to the interpretation of the parable of the sower, the devil takes the word out of the heart of newly interested hearers (8:12); in the Beelzebul controversy, the two kingdoms of God and Satan exist and are in battle with each other (11:14-23) – in Jesus, the power of God over the devil and his demons is effective, in his exorcisms, the kingdom of God proves already present (11:20); the same is true for the healing story in 13:11-17, where Jesus successfully combats disease and therefore Satan. What Jesus does is nothing but effectively exercising the power of God over Satan in the earthly realm, in an especially public way in his exorcisms, and this is possible because the devil is already cast out of heaven and so *in principle* has lost his power. The vision of Luke 10:18 means that in heaven God’s kingdom has already won the final victory over Satan. The final eschatological defeat of Satan is anticipated in Jesus’ ministry.

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41 Conzelmann, Mitte. Against it Kalms, Sturz 210-211; Aune, Teufel 184.

### 3.3. Group Conflicts

The Beelzebul controversy (Mark 3:22-27par.) contains a memory of a social conflict between the wandering group around Jesus and the structures of Galilean village life, challenged by the unconventional way of life of the Jesus group. The village leaders' strategy of treating the Jesus group as outcasts identifies Jesus as an instrument of Beelzebul by ascribing Jesus' power to cast out demons to the devil and thereby clearly compromising his healing activity. The social acceptance of the exorcisms depends upon the affiliation to the right group and tradition (cf. the acceptable exorcisms of "your sons" in Jesus' reply Luke 11:19); it is a question of being insiders or outsiders.<sup>42</sup>

In the allegorization of the parable of the tares in the wheat in Matt 13:36-43, the conflict between the Son of Man and the devil about the kingdom of heaven intends an eschatological motivation of the community and a devaluation of the ones who reject the kingdom as children of the devil, using a dualistic scheme. The devil as the opponent per se functions as a paradigm of the opposing Jewish majority refusing to accept Christ; so in John 8:44, the Jewish authorities are charged with having the devil as their father, and in Rev 2:9; 3:9, the Jewish communities in Asia Minor are dismissed as "synagogue of Satan". An opponent of the Christian mission from outside is called "son of the devil" in Acts 13:10.

Especially threatening appears opposition as an in-group phenomenon.<sup>43</sup> Connecting such opponents with the devil means a devaluation and categorization of the opposing group. Thus Paul in 2Cor 11:13-15 states that the false apostles are pretending to be apostles of Christ and are at this like Satan, who plays the part of an angel of the light, because they are his servants.<sup>44</sup> When the devil is able to influence the minds or take hold of individuals in order to use them as his instruments or agents, a negative attitude to a special way of behaviour can be expressed; examples are Peter (Mark 8:33; Luke 22:31), Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3,53; John 6:70; 13:2,27) and Ananias (Acts 5:3). To cast a wrongdoer out of the community means handing him over to the rule

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42 For a more detailed dealing with the Beelzebul controversy, see Ebner, Jesus 126-144.

43 Pagels, Origin (1995) brings into focus the social implications of the figure of the devil: to articulate conflicts and to indicate others as enemies. Problematic is her thesis that early Christians use the devil *in a special way* to morally dismiss opponents, in particular the Jews – which is a feature *common* to Early Jewish and Christian circles, not separating them.

44 Cf. 2Tim 2:26; Rom 16:17-20.



of Satan in the world – admittedly with the purpose of producing repentance by his suffering: 1Cor 5:5; 1Tim 1:20.

### 3.4. The Devil in the Revelation of John

In Revelation, the devil plays a significant role, being the central figure in the narrative complex in Rev 12, which combined different myths.<sup>45</sup> Rev 12:7-9 describe a battle in heaven: Michael and his angels defeat the dragon and his angels and throw the dragon down on earth. As comparable Early Jewish accounts show, this eschatological destruction marks the beginning of the final salvation of Israel (cf. Luke 10:18; John 12:31). With that Satan loses his traditional role as heavenly prosecutor (κατήγορ) of the righteous before God (Rev 12:10; cf. Zech 3:1-2; Job 1-2). But he continues on earth to act against the Christian communities in Asia Minor. So the devil is testing the communities by imprisonment and threatening (Rev 2:10). To serve this purpose, he is using an important instrument: the Roman Emperor and his propaganda apparatus, coded by the two beasts of Rev 13. In Revelation, the political rulers are understood as empowered by the devil, and as such dismissed as his bad instruments (2:13; 13:1-8; 17:8-13; cf. 2Thess 2:9-12). More generally, the threat by the strange but dominant Hellenistic-Roman culture is implied in the “depths of Satan” in Rev 2:24.<sup>46</sup>

As a next step in the cosmic drama, the devil is put into prison for a time span of a thousand years,<sup>47</sup> which can be read as an interim messianic kingdom. After this time, the devil will be released (a motif not to be found in Early Jewish apocalypticism), and he will gather the nations for the final combat against the righteous ones (20:7-9). Finally, through the power of God he is vanquished and thrown into the fiery sea to be annihilated (20:10).<sup>48</sup> In view of God’s final victory over Satan and his associates, already proved true in heaven, John conveys hopes that may lead his readers not to condone the present dominance of the Roman culture and to contradict and resist its threat.

45 The mythological background and its narrative function are discussed by Schreiber, *Sternenfrau* (2007).

46 More about that in Schreiber, *Sternenfrau* 455-456.

47 Rev 20:2. Cf. Azazel put in chains 1Hen 10:4-6.

48 Cf. the annihilation of the devil in Jub 50:5; AssMos 10:1; Matt 25:41; Rom 16:20. Wengst, *Devil* 72 stresses that the devil is a way of speaking of the coming God.

## 4. Conclusion

In Early Judaism and Formative Christianity, the devil forms a stock figure in the religious drama of God and the salvation of humankind. He appears as a mythological, supernatural personification of enmity towards the righteous and as the great opponent of God.

There is no doubt that the devil is subordinated to God. The subsequent question why God, obviously being superior to the devil, does not simply annihilate him, is not asked in this form, let alone answered. Narrative texts more likely reflect experiences than offer systematic solutions. Evil exists as a reality. In the last analysis, it is not possible to understand evil; but the myth at least allows for articulating it. So a strict concept of *Entmythologisierung* of the devil does not do justice to this literary character bearing a variety of associations on the part of the readers.<sup>49</sup> Talking of the devil means producing a speech event which fulfils theological and social functions. Today we can grasp the “reality” of the devil on the same level as the reality of the angels, to which category he traditionally belongs.

The concept of Satan corresponds to the various and multifarious experiences of evil in personal and social every-day life. While caution should be urged as to simple causalities, it is clear that in the literary contexts the devil appears as a cipher for an existential political, cultural or personal threat; in the personification of the devil, evil becomes visible. On the one side, evil is experienced as an occurrence like disease and death, the causes of which are grounded outside human influence and therefore demand a cosmological explanation. On the other side, the devil helps to make clear for the in-group what is evil and which behaviour is wrong.

The concept of the devil allows for an identification and judgement of the social or collective enemy, partially in connection with the experience of powerlessness in a minority situation. The opposing group can unambiguously be dismissed as associates of the devil. Inherent, however, is the danger of simplistic condemnations. More generally, the figure of the devil can help to define the negative quality of the present time, i.e. to motivate the hearers to withstand the temptation of losing their own Jewish/Christian identity. Eschatologically, the annihilation of the devil will bring about a new quality of the reality of life, heightening the motivation to stay within the group.

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49 Different statements have been submitted by Haag, Teufelsglaube 24-25, 387, 504 and, to the contrary, Baumbach, Funktion 166-167.

Already in the present Satan can be overcome with the means that form the identity of the religious group or community, i.e. good conduct, constantly doing the will of God as found in the Torah or in Christ, respectively. The Christian change in the formation of identity can be grasped in Rom 7, where there is no possibility to overcome sin by means of the Torah; the solution now is given by the “event of Jesus Christ” that fundamentally lays new foundations for the relationship between man, sin and God (Rom 8:31-39). Whereas in general sin is attributed to the devil as its cause, in some cases sin acts as an independent, effective disastrous power (e.g., in Rom 7).

Open questions remain. One concerns the guilt of man in view of the devil being the cause of a violation. But as GLAE, e.g., makes clear, the work of the devil does not exonerate man of his guilt (without actually clarifying the interrelation). Open, too, remains the reason for the process of removing evil from God. Is it to avoid burdening God with the responsibility for man to do evil (as GLAE offers a slight glimpse)? But this process is not necessarily dependent on theodicy, but is perhaps meant to structure the cosmos and to achieve an eschatologically orientated hope of salvation from evil. At any rate, the theological outsourcing of evil allows for producing a type figure *sui generis* – the great opponent.

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